

**Texas- Louisiana Gulf-Coast Synod**  
**Minutes of the 30th Synod Assembly**  
**May 18-20, 2017**

**Venue:** Houston North Hilton Hotel, Houston, Texas

**Thursday, May 18**

1. The Synod Assembly was called to order by Evan Moilan at 2:15p. He walked us through the plans for the Assembly. The Bishop introduced the Synod and LEAD staffs and then introduced the Executive Committee, the Synod Council, and the conference deans.

2. Pr. Parnell presented a credentials report, which was adopted by the Assembly. A quorum was present.

MSC: standing rules adopted as proposed

MSC: agenda adopted as proposed.

3. Pr. Jen Kindsvatter presented the list of nominees for Synod Council, and the consultation and discipline committees. No nominations were made from the floor. See the agenda for this list.

4. Pr. Lundborg introduced the rostered leaders who came to our Synod since the 2016 Assembly.

5. Lynnae Schatz delivered a presentation on the 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering, which will take place in Houston June 27 - July 1, 2018. She detailed the need for local volunteers and provided the information needed for folks who wanted to serve in this capacity.

6. Pr. Pam Dormand brought greetings to the Assembly from the Mission Investment Fund, praising the Synod for the partnership with the Fund to the substantive benefit of parishes such as Christ the King, Houston.

7. Robert Rivera, a member of the Synod Council and the sole candidate to become the Synod's Vice-President, spoke to the Assembly and told us that his vision was a Synod which would actively accompany all of our brothers and sisters, a Synod that will build community with them, and a Synod that would work tirelessly to provide hope and resiliency to everyone.

8. Pr. Andrew Bell, the chairperson of the Election Committee, moved to elect by acclamation all who were running unopposed. The Assembly agreed. That meant that the Assembly had only two Synod Council positions for which to cast ballots, namely, Lay Male and Youth. Ballots were distributed and votes cast.

9. The Bishop gave his State of the Synod report. He began by reminding us the, in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, we know nothing about the victim's religion, economic status or political beliefs. All the Samaritan needed to know was that a brother was in need and that he had the wherewithal to help. He reminded us that people will belong before they believe and that the 21% of our parishes that grew last year shows us all that it can be done. To "thunderous" applause, he told us that this was the first year that LEAD finished the year in the black. And he noted that the Synod did too.

10. Our keynote addresses will focus on the Assembly theme, namely, Who is My Neighbor? The first address was delivered by Sunitha Mortha, an immigrant from India, who told the Assembly her story. Of most interest was that she remarked that she went from experiencing discrimination in her home country based on caste to discrimination in the United States based on color of skin and on accent. We had very fruitful discussions about answers to four questions including "What did you hear in my presentation?"

### **Friday, May 19**

1. Our opening meditation was led by the Glocal Musicians - Wow! Such powerful ministry in song!

2. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service showed the Assembly a moving video about how LIRS and volunteers work with immigrants and refugees.

3. The Bishop reviewed what transpired yesterday and what will come today.

4. Pr. Parnell presented the credentials report. It showed that as quorum was present.

5. Pr. Bell gave the elections report. Paul Antolik and Ismael Danforth were elected to Synod Council Lay Male and Youth positions, respectively.

6. The Assembly was graced by Prs. Mindy Roll and Janelle Hooper, our Lutheran Campus pastors at Texas A&M/Blinn College and UH/Rice, respectively. It was moving to listen to these leaders who are ever so responsible for nurturing the future of the church.

7. Pr. Markert, the Synod's Mission Catalyst, regaled the Assembly with wonderful stories of new starts and revitalized parishes, and he exhorted everyone, both parishes and individual's to become "mission partners".

8. Kathy Collins present the Treasurer's Report. There was much applause at the news that the Synod finished the fiscal year that ended January 31, 2017, with a surplus of \$46,000. She also told us that we have a final audit report, and it was a "clean audit". The Bishop moved that the Assembly "adopt" the audit report. The Assembly agreed.

9. The Bishop recessed the Assembly for **the annual Lutherhill Board** meeting.

a. Matt Kindsvatter began with a joyous report that the Zion Retreat Center on Galveston Island was open for business, and he again praised the folks from Zion Lutheran Church for their foresight and generosity in giving this property to the Synod/Lutherhill to do ministry in a different way. He noted that Lutherhill had 9,694 guest nights in 2016 and impacted the lives of almost 7,000 people.

b. Jeff Brady, Lutherhill's Board President, took over and moved the reelection of three Lutherhill Board members and the election of one new Board member. The Assembly concurred. He also presented a change to a by-law concerning electronic voting, which was approved by the Assembly.

c. We heard spoke wonderful testimony from the parents of a diabetic child who praised Matt and the Lutherhill staff for including this youngster in the full range of camp activities.

10. Evan reported on the \$500,000 for the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation campaign. Thus far, \$267,247 has been raised for World Hunger, or 53% of the goal. The Bishop urged all congregations to hold special World Hunger Sundays between now and October 2017.

11. Pr. Lundborg gave his Assistant to the Bishop for Leadership report. Of note, he explained there has been a shift in demographics from 55% of Lutherans residing in rural areas in 1940 to only 12% today. This requires to start developing a different kind of rostered leader. A number of congregations, for instance, cannot afford a full-time pastor, but the number of pastors willing to work part-time is way short of the number of congregations needing a part-time pastor. He also discussed the compensation guidelines (to be voted on Saturday, May 20), noting that they are premised on the teacher's salaries in the relevant Independent School Districts.

12. Cam Dogan presented the second of our keynote addresses. His story is that he is an observant Muslim and immigrated to Houston from Turkey. He has been here for almost 15 years and noted how important it is to him to faithfully observe the prayer life of a Muslim. He talked about how it is to be Muslim in Houston today. He urged Muslims and Christians to get together and dialogue so that each can be far more conversant about the other's faith.

13. Jamal Lewis presented our third keynote address. An African-American lesbian woman, she talk fervently and powerfully about her sexual orientation and the church. Her seminal question: "What legacy is to be found in our silence." Another question was "Why is it an instinctive reaction to define the LGBTQ community in terms of sex, while heterosexuals are not similarly defined?" Significant discussion followed throughout the Assembly.

14. The companion synod teams reported on the ongoing relationship between our Synod and the Lutherans in the Central African Republic (CAR) and those in Peru.

15. We heard the report from the Lutheran Foundation of the Southwest. LiveOn made \$87,000 in grants in 2016, and, among other delightful facts, we have now gone 4 consecutive years with no new debt burdening our ministry candidates and too they increased grants to our campus ministries by almost 50% over 2015. Liz Johnson, the Foundation's Gift Planner, urged us all to consider how our gifts today can be a boon for the future.

16. Peggy Hahn delivered LEAD's report. She noted that LEAD is now in its fifth year and that 77% of its funds come from user fees with another 9% coming from donors. Editorial comment: LEAD remains the true "poster child" for the value of strategic planning.

17. We then heard from Judith Roberts, the ELCA's Program Director for Racial Justice, who brought to us the ELCA report.

### **Saturday, May 20**

1. Opening prayer devotion was led by Sunitha Mortha using on Acts 10:9-16. And we discussed this passage through questions such as "What would be the word for us today?"

2. The Bishop called the meeting to order at 9:05. His question this morning is "Where do I draw the line about who I must love?"

3. Pr. Parnell presented the credentials committee report. 60.10% Lay/39.90% Clergy. Report adopted. Quorum established. The Bishop noted that 60.10% is getting "dangerously" close to the minimum required lay participation of 60%.

4. Pr. Lundborg moved approval of the compensation guidelines. Motion passed.

5. The Bishop brought up the budget for 2018-2019. Budget is adopted.

6. Pr. Lundborg presented a number of folks to be recognized for milestones in anniversaries of ordination, retirements etc., and congregations observing milestones.

7. Kathy Patrick (the Synod's lawyer) presented our fourth keynote address. She eloquently told us what it was like to be a woman lawyer in a world dominated by men. She emphasized that "sexism" is rampant even today and that her freedom is limited by gender roles. God does not reach down and "fix things" - so she works to "fix things" herself, striving to get to the point where her dignity as a child of God is as respected as the dignity of the male children of God. Powerful discussion followed.

8. As part of our closing service, we installed our new Synod Council and Synod committee members.

9. The Assembly was adjourned.

C. John Turnquist, Secretary

**Notes on the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Assembly  
of the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod, ELCA  
May 18-20, 2017**

On May 18-20, 2017, the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod, ELCA, conducted its 30<sup>th</sup> annual Assembly. The theme of this Assembly was “Who is my Neighbor?”, and over the course of Assembly, we were given a variety of opportunities to craft answers to that question.

While we did not have an official Assembly “theme song”, many of us considered we had an unofficial one. You see, one of our favorite guests was the Glocal Musicians Educators, an aggregation of singers/musicians from around the country who throughout the course of the Assembly had us dancing, clapping, smiling, and thinking with wonderful music from many lands and places. One piece they performed several times was Shirley Murray’s *For Everyone Born, A Place at the Table* (Words: Copyright 1998 Hope Publishing Company; Music: Copyright 1999, Hope Publishing Company, All Rights Reserved), and, by the end of the Assembly, many of us were singing along with them.

*For Everyone Born, a Place at the Table,  
For everyone born, clean water and bread,  
A shelter, a space, a safe place for growing,  
For everyone born, a star overhead.*

At the outset of the Assembly, the Bishop noted that Evan Moilan, our then-current Synod Vice President, would not be standing for reelection to another term and applauded Evan's eight gracious years of service to the Synod as its senior lay person. It was clear from the reaction of the Assembly that all were in agreement with the Bishop - and we wished Evan "fair winds and following seas" in his new life endeavors.

*For woman and man, a place at the table,  
Revising the roles, deciding the share,  
With wisdom and grace, dividing the power  
For woman and man, a system that’s fair.*

Once the agenda was approved and the standing rules adopted, we learned who the candidates were for Synod Council and the Synod's Consultation and Discipline Committees. Being as there were no nominations from the floor, the Assembly elected by acclamation (1) Robert Rivera as Synod Vice President and Pr. Mark Warpmaeker, Renee Alfaro, Tom Wildrick, Shelli Williamson, and Alex Norden to positions on the Synod Council as they were running unopposed; (2) Bubba Flowers and Pr. William Schwertilch to the Consultation Committee; and

(4) Amy Dhodapkar, Pr. Tracey B. Schultz, John Tipton, and Pr. Will Storm to the Discipline Committee. There were two open Synod Council positions with at least two nominees each. The Assembly elected Paul Antolik and Ismael Danforth to Lay Male and Youth positions, respectively. We then heard about the 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering to be held in Houston and the need for a wide variety of local volunteers and were graced with a presentation by Robert Rivera, our new Synod Vice-President.

*For young and for old, a place at the table,  
A voice to be heard, a part in the song,  
The hands of a child in hands that are wrinkled,  
For young and for old, the right to belong.*

At the beginning of his State of the Synod address, the Bishop reminded us that, aside from his gender, neither we nor the Samaritan in The Parable of the Good Samaritan knew anything about the victim, not his ethnicity, his age, his sexual orientation, his economic status, not even his nationality. All the Samaritan knew was that he was in need, and it is hard to find a more powerful definition of "neighbor". What a way to get us started in working with our Assembly's theme! And later in the Assembly, he asked this question: "Where do I draw the line about who I must love?"

*For just and unjust, a place at the table,  
Abuser, abused, with need to forgive,  
In anger, in hurt, a mindset of mercy,  
For just and unjust, a new way to live.*

Instead of one keynote address, we were graced with four powerful presentations, all aimed at identifying roadblocks in our society to becoming neighbors with those who are not "us". Sunitha Mortha, an ELCA pastor from a line of Lutheran pastors, is also a native of India, forcefully discussed how it was to go from discrimination in her native country based on caste to discrimination here based on skin color and accented voice. Can Dogan immigrated to Houston from Turkey to complete his education. He told us what it was like to be a practicing and devout Muslim even in this the most diverse city in the United States and urged all Christians and Muslims to have conversations with each other so that the perceived obstacles to understanding each other's faith can be destroyed. Jamal Lewis is a transgender African-American lesbian who provided us with ever so much food for thought as regards the many reasons why the LGBTQ community does not feel welcome or safe in most churches, which is our "legacy of silence". Our fourth presenter was Kathy Patrick, who is the Synod's lawyer and whose resume and record is staggeringly impressive, but who quieted the Assembly with a searing indictment of the persistent sexism in our land, something that despite her quality background, she experiences even today.

Everyone left this Assembly with four focused areas of further discussion in our homes and in our home congregations with the goal of eliminating as many barriers to interactions with every neighbor.

*For gay and for straight, a place at the table,  
A covenant shared, a welcoming space,  
A rainbow of race and gender and color,  
For gay and for straight, the chalice of grace.*

Pr. Chris Markert, the Synod's Mission Catalyst, was delightfully excited as he told us wonderful stories about new starts and revitalized parishes, urging every person and congregation to become a mission partner. Matt Kindsvatter, Executive Director of Lutherhill, told us that the Zion Retreat Center on Galveston Island was open for business and that Lutherhill had over 9,600 guest nights and impacted the lives of almost 7,000 people. Pr. Blair Lundborg, the Assistant to the Bishop for Leadership, among other matters, discussed the compensation guidelines for the next year. The Assembly approved those guidelines. Peggy Hahn, the Executive Director of LEAD, noted that, now in its fifth year, almost 80% of LEAD's funds come from user fees with an additional 9% coming from donors. LEAD remains the perfect "poster child" for the value of strategic planning. Lutheran Foundation of the Southwest drew robust applause when we were told that, for the fourth consecutive year, our ministry candidates incurred no new education debt, and that the grants to campus ministries increased by almost 50%.

*For everyone born, a place at the table,  
To live without fear, and simply to be,  
To work, to speak out, to witness and worship,  
For everyone born, the right to be free.*

Our Treasurer, Kathy Collins, received much applause with the news that the Synod finished the fiscal year ending January 31, 2017, with a \$46,000 surplus and also received a clean audit. The Assembly adopted the audit report and approved the budget for 2018-2019. And many of us left with Shirley Murray's refrain joyously ringing in our ears:

*And God will delight when we are creators  
Of justice and joy, compassion and peace,  
Yes, God will delight when we are creators  
Of justice, justice and joy.*